

Report To:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date:	15 DECEMBER 2022
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW: COST OF LIVING
Executive Lead Member:	NOT APPLICABLE
Ward/s:	ALL
Key Decision:	NO
Subject to Call-In:	NO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with further information regarding the Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living. Members have held one previous meeting on this topic in October 2022.

Recommendation(s)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained within the report.
- b. Consider next steps to progress the Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Cost of Living was added to the scrutiny work programme 2022/23 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2022. Furthermore, a cost of living emergency has been declared by Council and a State of Ashfield Debate has been organised focused on the key issues arising from the cost of living crisis.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered at this stage of the review. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members will consider all work being undertaken across the Council in efforts to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis and avoid duplication of work.

Detailed Information

FUEL POVERTY AND WARM HUBS

The End Fuel Poverty Coalition is a broad coalition of anti-poverty, environmental, health, and housing campaigners, charities, local authorities, trade unions, and consumer organisations. The Coalition defines fuel poverty as the condition by which a household is unable to afford to heat (or cool) their home to an adequate temperature. Fuel poverty is caused by low income, high fuel prices, poor energy efficiency, unaffordable housing prices, and poor quality private rental housing.¹

In August 2022, the Child Poverty Action Group, a group that works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty, published fuel poverty estimates for the United Kingdom. The analysis estimates that by January 2023, over half of households in the UK (15 million) will be in fuel poverty – spending over 10 per cent of net income on fuel. These households will on average be spending £37.51 above the 10 per cent threshold. Over 80 per cent of large families, lone parents, and pensioner couples will be in fuel poverty.²

At the previous meeting of the Committee, Members discussed 'Warm Hubs' resolving that it be ascertained as to whether the Council is utilising buildings and/or preparing any events over the winter to provide warm, safe places for people. Warm Hubs are intended as places in local communities where people can find a safe, accessible, and warm environment during the day to help reduce the cost of heating their own homes and to help those facing extreme fuel poverty through the winter.

Following this, the Council's Health and Wellbeing Team have provided information regarding efforts to organise and establish Warm Hubs in Ashfield. At an Ashfield Community Development Group meeting in September 2022, attendees representing organisations were asked to think about support they could offer in establishing Warm Hubs amidst the rising cost of living.

Interested organisations were asked to register for the Warm Welcome Campaign and notify the Council of intentions to set up Warm Hubs so the information could be shared. The Warm Welcome Campaign website includes a feature where people can find a space in their local area and details of the facilities on offer.

INFORMATION FOR COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

At the previous meeting, Members learned of work being undertaken internally by the Council to understand the impact of the cost of living crisis on employees. Members wished to understand what information had been made available to employees to provide support throughout the cost of living crisis and the many issues associated.

A Cost of Living Helpful Information page has been established on the internal website for Council employees. The page features various links where employees can access financial information, energy/utility help, unions, and additional support such as confidential support services for anyone struggling to cope.

Furthermore, Aspiring Leaders within the Council have recently asked employees to take part in a short survey relating to the cost of living crisis. 134 employees took part in the survey with the results showing that 122 of responders feel they will be worse off.

¹ End Fuel Poverty Coalition, *About Fuel Poverty*, September 2022.

² Johnathan Bradshaw and Antonia Keung, *Fuel Poverty: Updated Estimates for the UK*, Child Poverty Action Group/Social Policy Research Unit – The University of York, 4 August 2022.

COST OF LIVING HUB

At the previous meeting of the Committee, Members discussed the importance of the Council acting as an information hub for residents and requested further information on what dedicated pages are currently available on the Council's website offering support, signposting, and guidance to residents seeking help and advice with a wide array of issues relating to the cost of living crisis.

A cost of living support hub has been established on the Council's website. The hub is featured prominently on the main page of the website and features numerous pages with key information and links to help residents and businesses during the cost of living issues. This includes links to information on:

- Benefits, Council Tax, and Housing Support
- Council Services Support
- Support for Businesses
- Money, Bills, and Debt Support
- Health and Wellbeing Support
- Support from Other Organisations

The page also links to the Government's cost of living factsheet updated in June 2022. The factsheet provides information and advice on:

- Energy bills support scheme information
- Cost of Living payment for people on means tested benefits
- Pensioner Cost of Living payment
- Disability Cost of Living Payment
- Household support fund

A further link is also included to the Cost of Living: Support in Ashfield Directory produced by Ashfield Voluntary Action. The directory includes information for many organisations throughout Ashfield that are offering an array of support such as:

- Food banks, food clubs, and other food related support
- Money, debt advice, benefits checks, and other financial support
- Mental health support
- Children and families support
- Energy and fuel support
- Housing
- Domestic abuse
- Useful contacts/links

A 'Feeding Ashfield' page has also been established on the Council's website. Feeding Ashfield is a network of local food banks, food clubs, allotments, and other organisations working collaboratively with the aim of providing improved access to food and educational opportunities throughout the District.

The Feeding Ashfield page provides details of services available such as food banks and food clubs and features an interactive map to find the locations of food banks, food clubs, and community allotments in Ashfield.

STATE OF ASHFIELD DEBATE

The annual State of Ashfield Debate will take place on Thursday 8 December. The debate will focus on the cost of living crisis with attendance from all Councillors. The purpose of the meeting will be to enable the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet to gather information on the issues and matters which are of concern to Members and which can be considered as part of the preparations for business planning and the proposals for the Council's budget and policy framework in the forthcoming year.

The debate will feature an introduction from the Council's Chief Executive, a presentation by the Chief Executive of Citizens' Advice Ashfield, a presentation from Our Centre, a presentation from Under One Roof Community Resource Centre, and a presentation by the Mid Nottinghamshire Placed Based Partnership. Following introductions and presentations, Members will have the opportunity to undertake a question and answer session with all attendees.

As the State of Ashfield Debate will take place before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, Members may wish to discuss the outcomes of the debate and the potential impact to the Scrutiny Review: Cost of Living.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The cost of living crisis has many implications for all key priorities set out by the Council within the Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members will use the priorities within the Corporate Plan to understand to understand how the Council should respond to the crisis going forward.

Legal:

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Finance:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
The cost of living crisis is an issue of key priority for the Council following the declaration of a cost of living emergency and the impacts to many aspects of the Council's service delivery.	The Council is using many different forums to understand the key issues caused by the cost of living crisis such as Overview and Scrutiny, an organised State of Ashfield Debate, and internal working groups.

Human Resources:

There are no direct human resources implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Environmental/Sustainability:

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Equalities:

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Other Implications:

None.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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